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SIPDIS

PLEASE PASS TO G/IWI (KHADIAGALA) AND EUR/NB

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: FINLAND: CHILD MARRIAGE

REF: SECSTATE 36341

1. (U) The following responses are keyed to paragraph 6 of reftel:

A) (U) The legal age of marriage for males and females in Finland is 18. The Ministry for Justice reports that the overwhelming majority of marriages in Finland are between couples age 18 and older. It is possible to petition the Justice Ministry for permission to marry below the age of 18 in special circumstances and with parental consent (if applicable). In practice, this rarely happens, and when it does occur, it is usually in conjunction with a pregnant teenager petitioning to marry the baby's father (also a teenager or young man) and not in conjunction with a "child bride" phenomenon. In 2003, out of a total of 25,815 marriages, only two males and 24 females were under 18 at the time they were married.

B) (U) Underage marriage is not a significant problem in Finland. Neither ethnic Finns nor minorities marry before the age of 18 except in unusual circumstances. NGOs that work with minority groups report that they receive complaints from Kurds and others that Finnish consular officials abroad will not approve visas for adult women who wish to come to Finland to marry as a result of an "arranged" marriage; according to the NGOs, it would be extremely unlikely that Finnish officials would approve such an arrangement with a minor. Finnish couples tend to marry relatively late in life. In 2003, the average age of first marriage for females was 29 and for males 31; the trend is toward even later marriages.

C) (U) N/A.

MACK